



News Release

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WINNING LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE STUDENTS ANNOUNCED

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LANSING – One Michigan girl discovered she can be both courageous and forgiving, a second learned to like herself no matter what others may think, and a third now sees beauty everywhere.

All are winners of the 2015 Letters about Literature (LAL) contest, announced by the Library of Michigan (LM) today.

LAL is an annual contest sponsored by the National Center for the Book at the Library of Congress. Young readers write letters to authors, living or dead, describing how the authors' work changed their lives.

Students participate through classroom activities or by writing to an author on their own. Participating schools and libraries encourage students to submit letters.

"Literature helps children and teens learn about others and understand their own experiences through the characters with whom they connect. The letters they write in the LAL program help them articulate an understanding of issues in the books they read," said LAL Coordinator Karren Reish from the Library of Michigan. "Through these letters, we can encourage students to cultivate these deep-reading skills that are key to academic and lifelong success."

LAL winners are:

- Soja Kureekkattil of Rochester Hills – State Level I winner (grades 4-6). She wrote author Malala Yousafzai about her book, *I Am Malala*.

In her letter, Soja wrote that the author helped her understand how a person can be both courageous and forgiving. "I may never receive the Nobel Peace Prize...but I know I can make a difference."

- Ellie Martin of Alma – State Level II winner (grades 7-8). She wrote author Jerry Spinelli about his book, *Star Girl*.

Ellie said *Star Girl* helped her understand how to embrace being herself and that what other people do "doesn't matter so long as you do what feels right to you."

- Rashna Soonavala of Rochester Hills – State Level III winner (grades 9-12). She wrote poet William Wordsworth about his poem, *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*.

Rashna said she learned to be aware of the beauty that surrounds her in daily life, and that “there is something cathartic about ... the simple beauty of how bright the sun shines or how vivid in color the flower petals are.”

Their complete letters at www.michigan.gov/youthlibraryservices.

State Finalists:

- A. Hadley Gorsline of Saginaw – Level I
- Henry Robinson of Saline – Level I
- Nanami Takahashi of Novi – Level I
- Ryan Chatterjee of Rochester Hills – Level II
- Makena Torrey of West Bloomfield – Level II
- Alice Erman of Imlay City – Level III
- Rachel Pokornowski of Allegan – Level III
- Taylor Wahl or Allegan – Level III

State winners receive a \$50 Schuler Books & Music gift card and \$250 Reading promotion grant for the library of their choice.

Soja and Rashna awarded their grants to the Rochester Hills Public Library, while Ellie directed hers to Donald L. Pavlik Middle School.

State finalists receive a \$20 gift card to Schuler Books & Music.

Gifts cards and grants are courtesy the Library of Congress and the Michigan Center for the Book, a program of LM and member affiliates.

Nancy Hascall of Allegan High School was announced as the 2015 Michigan LAL Teacher of the Year.

For more information about the Michigan Center for the Book and its programs, visit www.michigan.gov/mcfb.

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The Library of Michigan – Michigan’s official state library agency for more than 175 years – is part of the Michigan Department of Education. To learn more, visit www.michigan.gov/libraryofmichigan.